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ABSTRACT

The booklet describes efforts to preserve Australian Aboriginal languages and culture, profiles individuals who have a significant role in these efforts, contains individuals' commentaries on Aboriginal language issues, gives background information on the languages and language groups, and describes programs and organizations supporting the maintenance of the languages within mainstream Australian culture. Programs described include language courses, language revival movements, college second language programs, regional Aboriginal centers, adult education programs, recording of Aboriginal songs, translation projects, language research, art, incorporation of Aboriginal languages into the national curriculum, and consultation programs. Language-related anecdotes and numerous photographs are also included. A list of print and organizational resources in each territory is provided. (MSE)

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Alive AND DEADLY

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Reviving and Maintaining Australian Indigenous Languages

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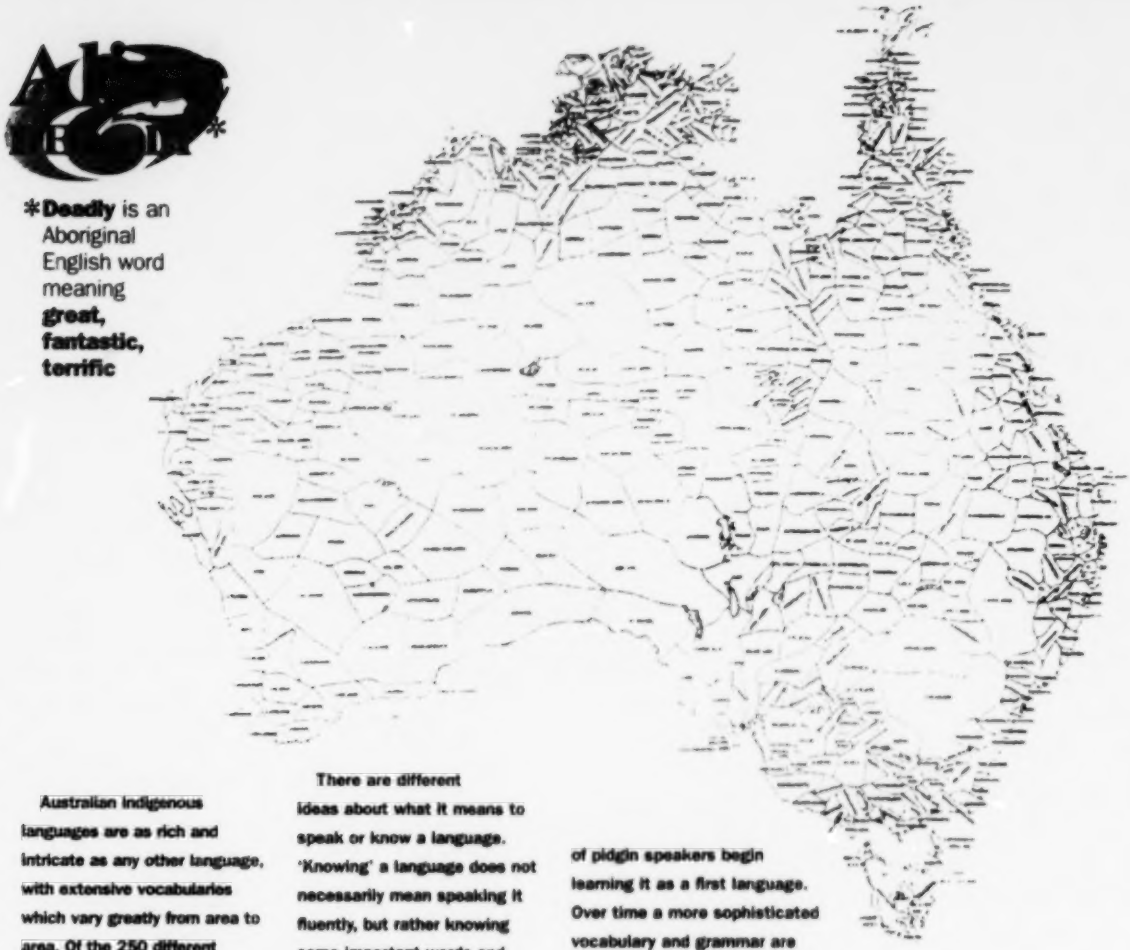

Deadly** is an Aboriginal English word meaning **great, fantastic, terrific

Australian indigenous languages are as rich and intricate as any other language, with extensive vocabularies which vary greatly from area to area. Of the 250 different languages and 500 dialects spoken before white colonisation, more than 30 are currently being used as the normal medium of communication. Dozens more are being revived.

Today, indigenous languages are classified into two main groups — Pama-Nyungan, which covers languages spoken around the majority of Australia, and non-Pama Nyungan, which covers languages spoken from the north of West Australia and northwest of the Northern Territory. (*Macquarie Aboriginal Words 1994*).

About 15 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders speak an indigenous language, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics' *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey, 1994.*

There are different ideas about what it means to speak or know a language. 'Knowing' a language does not necessarily mean speaking it fluently, but rather knowing some important words and using them appropriately.

Language maintenance refers to efforts to promote the *continuing use* of a language in all its forms and in a wide range of contexts.

Language revival attempts to *increase* or *bring back into usage* aspects of language or patterns of usage that have fallen into disuse. Language revival is often used as a general term for language reclamation, renewal and revitalisation.

Pidgin is the first language of contact. It is nobody's primary language, but a special purpose language which allows people who do not know each other's language to communicate.

Creoles evolve from pidgins as they expand and become more complex. This usually happens when children of pidgin speakers begin learning it as a first language. Over time a more sophisticated vocabulary and grammar are built. Both pidgins and creoles are used as a common language for people who belong to different traditional language groups. The creole spoken in northern Australia is known as Kriol. It is spoken from Roper River in the Northern Territory to the Kimberleys in north West Australia.

A **dialect** is a form of language which has a regional or socio-cultural base, which differs from standard forms. Aboriginal English is the name given to dialects of English spoken by Aboriginal people. There are several Aboriginal English dialects across Australia — they are classified along a continuum of light to heavy. Light forms are very close to standard Australian English, and heavier versions are closer to Kriol and spoken in remote areas.

Map: *Aboriginal Tribes of Australia by N.B. Tindale, 1974*

Please note: this map represents N.B. Tindale's interpretation of Aboriginal political and language boundaries as they existed at the time of European contact.

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LANGUAGE

Languages are precious storehouses of history, experience and culture; a crucial link between the past and the future.

This booklet is a snapshot of the myriad ways Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are working to keep languages strong: through music, dance and literature, in language centres, schools and the media, in remote communities, in big cities and towns, in river beds and under trees.

For indigenous people, whose languages have been under threat since the invasion in 1788, the link between language and culture is especially profound.

As Aboriginal linguist Jeanie Bell says, 'We are now making a strong statement ... our culture isn't dead and our languages aren't dead. Our languages have survived and they are very precious to us and very powerful.'

Awareness and understanding of Australia's rich linguistic heritage will help preserve the living gift of words, songs and stories. There's a lot to gain: a priceless heritage from the world's oldest religion and culture, and a proud future for all Australians.

OUR LANGUAGES

Jeanie Bell is a Murrie woman from south-east Queensland and one of Australia's first Aboriginal linguists. In 1993, Jeanie presented one of the prestigious Boyer Lectures on ABC Radio, about the revival and maintenance of indigenous languages, entitled *The Voices of the Land*.

ON ABORIGINAL IDENTITY: One of the key issues Jeanie raises is the importance of language to Aboriginal identity, regardless of whether a speaker is fluent or not. 'You don't have to be speaking your language daily for it to be important to you. It's the whole feeling of knowing your language is there and that you can go and pick up a book, or speak words and know that it is your language ... We can never get that from English, no matter how well we speak it ...'

RAISING AWARENESS: Jeanie also spoke of the need to raise awareness among the wider community of the importance of language revival. 'We're dealing with a mass of non-Aboriginal people who don't even realise that indigenous languages survived; some are surprised that we ever had languages at all.'

LANGUAGE AS A WAY OF LIFE

In many of the towns and outlying areas around the Kimberley region in West Australia, indigenous languages are often the sole means of communication for local people.

Interpreter and ATSIC Regional Councillor, Bonnie Edwards, has seen first-hand the difficulties faced by people who speak their own language fluently but know very little, if any, English.

'I work in hospitals, medical centres and welfare centres, where my skills as a speaker and translator are vital,' she said. 'Often it's in day to day situations that traditional speakers lose out, because there aren't enough people around who speak their languages.'

Bonnie also uses her interpreting skills to explain Native Title legislation — what it means for indigenous people and how to access the legal system to make a Native Title claim.

She is undertaking an interpreter training course run by the Kimberley Language Resource Centre. To participate you must be a fluent speaker of one of the target languages – Jaru, Kija, Kukatja and Kriol – and fluent in English.

The Interpreter Training Project, which is currently being run from Halls Creek and Balgo, will hopefully be extended throughout the Pilbara and the Kimberleys.

For Bonnie, teaching traditional languages to young people is not only essential for safeguarding the rights of indigenous people who speak little or no English, but also for preserving indigenous linguistic heritage.

'It is vital that younger people learn and use their languages, before these older traditional speakers die out and a huge living resource is lost.'

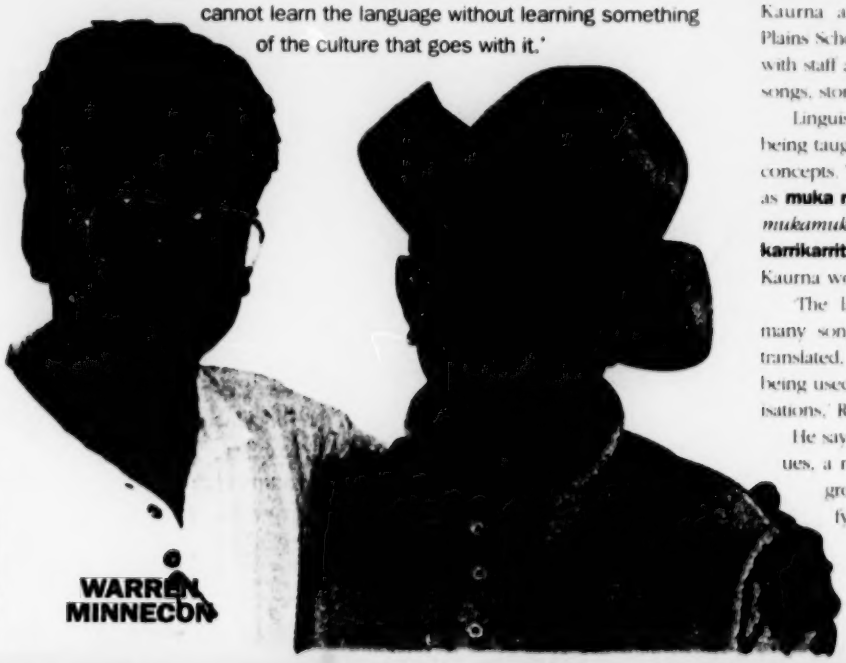
MAINTENANCE & REVIVAL

Jack Guttie is the sole surviving fluent speaker of the Yandruwandha language, which originates from the Innamincka area, 500 km west of Bourke in outback New South Wales.

Jack is an integral part of a language course at Bourke TAFE, which is recording Yandruwandha both orally and in written form, as well as teaching language to schools and community groups.

'I am very proud to be able to speak my language and proud to be part of this program to rebuild it — we have been more than successful,' Jack says. 'My hope is that I live long enough to see more and more people learn the language — it is important for our future that our language continues to belong to us.'

The course at Bourke TAFE is being taught to indigenous and non-indigenous students of all ages, and combines language work with classes on indigenous history and culture. He says: 'You cannot learn the language without learning something of the culture that goes with it.'



WARREN MINNECON

Kaurna

LANGUAGE RENAISSANCE

UNTIL RECENTLY, the few known Kaurna words from the Adelaide region in South Australia were associated with the Narrunga language from Yorke Peninsula.

German missionaries had documented some of the language in the 1830s and 1840s, and this has provided the basis for learning and developing the Kaurna language today.

The language revival began in 1990 with the inclusion of several Kaurna songs in a songbook Narrunga, Kaurna and Ngarrindjeri Songs. In 1992, Kaurna Plains School introduced a Kaurna language program, with staff and students learning the language, through songs, stories and everyday expressions.

Linguist Rob Amery says the Kaurna language being taught today continues to create new terms for concepts. The language now incorporates words such as **muka muka kamdo (computer)**, from the words *mukamuka (brain)* and *kamdo (lightning)*, and **kamikarritti**, which means **aeroplane**, from the Kaurna word *karrendi (to fly)*.

'The language is undergoing a renaissance — many songs have been composed, nursery rhymes translated, stories written, and Kaurna words are being used to name Aboriginal institutions and organisations,' Rob says.

He says as this reclamation of the language continues, a new Kaurna identity is being created and a growing number of people are actively identifying as Kaurna.

Worawa College

STRENGTHENING IDENTITY THROUGH LANGUAGE

Each morning in assembly, the 70 pupils at Worawa College in northern Victoria, like most students around Australia, recite their school poem. What makes Worawa unique is that its school poem is in Gupapuyngu, an Aboriginal language of North East Arnhem Land.

It is one of two indigenous languages taught at the college and from 1995 will be recognised as an accredited Year 12 language subject. The other is Yorta Yorta, a Victorian language.

The Yorta Yorta teaching program at Worawa Aboriginal College is an Australian first.

Teaching the language at the school is 86-year-old Geraldine Briggs, senior elder of the Yorta Yorta people and sole remaining speaker of the language of her people. Helping her is linguist Heather Bowe of Monash University.

Geraldine is determined the Yorta Yorta language will not die when she does, ensuring Worawa pupils learn first-hand how to speak and write an indigenous language which would have otherwise become extinct.

The course at Worawa is based on the Australian Indigenous Languages Framework (AILF), and allows students to learn one 'living' Aboriginal language while working to retrieve local languages.

At Worawa, students are learning the major language of north-east Arnhem Land, Gupapuyngu, as an example of a modern community language, in addition to Yorta Yorta.

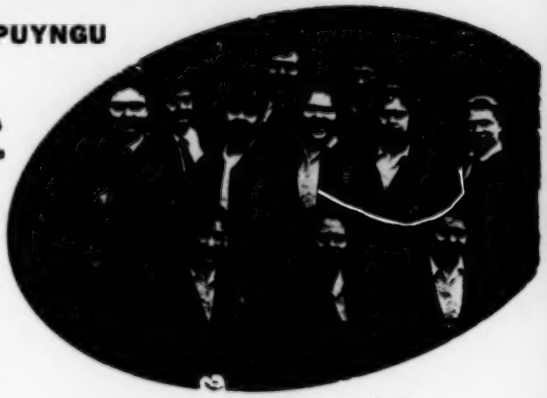
Lessons also involve study of 'non verbal' as well as 'verbal' communication.

Ian Yule, Principal of Worawa and teacher of Aboriginal children for the past 17 years says: 'The response [to the indigenous language program] has been very positive, as speaking Aboriginal languages reinforces the Aboriginal identity of the student.'

Since its establishment in 1983, Worawa has successfully combined an academic curricula with a strong Aboriginal culture program.

Ngarranydja dhuwala yothu baman'puy
I am a child of the dreamtime people
Yolnguwa dhiyakuy wängapuy nhakuna
Part of the land like the gnarled gum tree
räwak dharpa gaḏayka Ngarranydja dhuwala
I am the river softly singing
riyaia gapu gangga ḻiyaman nhina

GUPAPUYNGU



Above: Pupils of Worawa College and the first lines of their school song written by founder Dylias Matts

Nina Do you **tunapri** understand **mina** what I'm **karni?** saying?

Gaye Brown works at the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre.

WHAT IS PALAWA KARNI? 'Palawa Karni refers to the composite language spoken by Tasmanian Aborigines incarcerated on Flinders Island in the 1830s. The language allowed members of eight different nations to speak to each other. Palawa Karni is now being successfully revived and taught around Tasmania.'

THE BENEFITS: 'The re-introduction of our language is restoring our people's confidence and identity, which is helping to reverse the devastating effects of assimilation. One of the most important things has been the increasing use of the word 'Palawa'. Before the revival of our languages we adopted the word Koori or Tasmanian Aboriginal and seldom used our own word to identify who we are. The name Palawa is now used statewide with pride and has made our identity even stronger.'

THE BARRIERS: 'There are no traditional language speakers left, due to white invasion and war. Past government policies such as assimilation also contributed to the stifling of our language and culture. White academics fostered our languages for many years, but now is the time for them to recognise ownership by the people who really are the experts.'

HOPES FOR THE FUTURE: 'For white Australia to own up to the fact that Aboriginal people are the true owners of the land, its culture and its languages. And to continue our work at the centre so all Palawa people will have the opportunity to learn and speak our language always.'

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Werte, unte
te, maye ng
Kele, urreke
e, Kele are

Institute of Aboriginal Development

LANGUAGE STILL FLOWS AT ALICE SPRINGS

West of Alice Springs, one of the longest and oldest rivers in the world runs, yet much of it flows underground and surface water only appears after rain or where waterholes have formed.

Like the river, Aboriginal languages stretch back across millennia, and many have been forced underground.

In 1970, fearful that a unique linguistic heritage could be lost forever, the Institute of Aboriginal Development (IAD) in Alice Springs set out to revive, reclaim and maintain Aboriginal languages and culture.

They found there were deep reservoirs of language and knowledge which had survived white settlement.

Veronica Dobson, an Arremte teacher, interpreter and translator, says because her people lived in and around the town of Alice Springs 'for many years our language was put aside, but we still got the language, we never lost it'.

The IAD is an Aboriginal controlled adult education centre. Its Language Centre specialises in language research, cross culture and cultural maintenance programs and provides the only major nationally recognised training in Aboriginal interpreter services.

Wangka Maya

THE LANGUAGE PLACE IN THE PILBARA

THERE ARE NOT LESS THAN 28 indigenous languages in the Pilbara region and it is believed there are 3,000 speakers of these languages.

There have been determined efforts to maintain language and culture in the area, much of it organised by the Wangka Maya (Language Place) Pilbara Aboriginal Language Centre, in South Hedland.

Language worker Sue Smythe says: 'I remember as a kid living out on one of the cattle stations. Every night we would go to sleep to the sound of our elders singing, telling stories.

'I loved it and I will never forget it, and I want to work now to preserve it, and pass it on to my children and their children's children.'

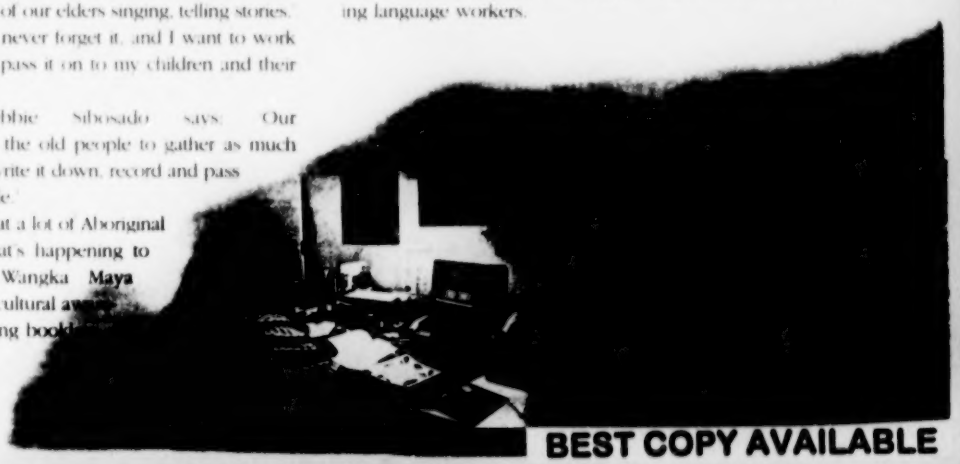
Administrator Debbie Sibosado says: 'Our priority is to work with the old people to gather as much information as we can, write it down, record and pass it on to the young people.'

Debbie is worried that a lot of Aboriginal people don't know what's happening to their languages, so Wangka Maya promotes language and cultural awareness, as well as producing books, dictionaries, short stories and books.

The Centre's other functions include promoting educational development, and addressing health and housing problems.

Wangka Maya also provides interpreter services and supports the learning of second languages in schools within the Language Other Than English (LOTE) framework.

It provides Aboriginal language teaching services to schools in the region, producing reading materials and training language workers.



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Interpreter Translator Service co-ordinator Joyce Measures says: 'it's an essential program within IAD.
It deals with communications difficulties regularly faced by indigenous people and the wider community. This program also plays a vital part in language maintenance by keeping Aboriginal languages strong.'

Maintaining language is a constant challenge. Pertame speakers Christobel Swan and Dougie Abbot are developing major word lists, structures and stories.

They plan to write a dictionary, and teach Pertame in schools.

The IAD Language Centre offers adult language courses, where both indigenous and non-indigenous people can learn an Aboriginal language.

Wangkangku culture
Language maintains culture
kanyini manu culturengku
and culture maintains
wangka kanyini. Wangka
language. When language
wiyaringkuntjala, culture
finishes
kulu wiyaringanyi.
culture also finishes.

Lizzie Ellis PITJANTJATJARA

The situation is urgent. From the original 28 local languages it is believed only five remain strong.

'We estimate that at the moment we have five really strong languages with between 500 and 1,000 speakers, but the others are weak,' said Debbie.

'People can get upset when we call a language 'dead' — but what we mean is that there are no living speakers, and their descendants have not revived the language. We have found one language, Putijarra, where there are only four speakers left. This is therefore top priority,' Debbie said.

Ann Sibosado, a member of Wangka Maya's governing body, said the task is to: 'Get other people to feel the same way we do about our languages.'

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Djabugay: the 'devil's language'

The language of Djabugay, and its four dialects were once spoken from Cairns up the Queensland coast to the Mowbray River and west to the outer boundary of the Atherton Plateau, and Port Douglas.

It is now confined to one dialect and the immediate region around the small town of Kuranda.

Djabugay teacher Rhonda Gululu Duffin says charcoal deposits show there was one continuous Bama culture for 40,000, possibly 50,000 years.

Djabugay story lore, known as storywaters, refer to events such as the rising of the sea level, and the end of last ice age 10,000 years ago. These songs, stories and legends come from a creation time, Bulurru.

The Djabugay people used canoes to travel up the Barron River between Cape Grafton and Port Douglas, to trade in shell-shafted spear throwers, bamboo spears, square-cut nautilus shells, beeswax necklaces, head dresses and dilly bags.

But in the 1890s pastoralists and timber cutters colonised Bama tablelands and rainforests.

In 1916, government permission was given for the Djabugay to be hunted down and forcibly removed to a Seventh Day Adventist Mission, Mona Mona, 15 km from Kuranda.

Here, Djabugay was declared to be the 'devil's language'.

Almost 50 years later in 1962 the mission was closed, but by then only about 50 people spoke the language fluently, and this dwindled to a handful by the late 1970s, until the revival of the Djabugay language began.

Kuranda

LANGUAGE AND CULTURE A DRAWCARD IN NORTH QUEENSLAND

THE TRADITIONAL LANGUAGES of the Bama people in far north Queensland were declared dead by white people. But the Bama have shown that even if only one or two speakers are left, with determination, dedication and hard work a so-called 'non-living' language can be revived.

Today, one of these languages, Djabugay, is being spoken around Kuranda, and is being taught to all the Bama and non-Bama children at Kuranda Public School. Last year it was recognised by the State education department as part of the language curriculum for Year 10. A survey of parents in 1994 showed widespread support for the Djabugay language classes among both indigenous and non-indigenous parents.

There's a Djabugay dictionary and teaching resources, on-the-job teacher training, books and other resources.

This extraordinary story began eight years ago, when Englishman Michael Quinn and a Djabugay elder met. Michael had been teaching English to migrants in Sydney, when he decided to visit Kuranda to find out about the Aboriginal culture of the rainforests.

'I asked one of the old men to talk to me about the cultural life of his people and he laughed at me, and told me he would only do so if I learnt to speak his language.

He introduced me to Roy Wanyarra Banning and other older language speakers. We immediately started classes, and all the Djabugay people who were interested in reviving the language came along.

'There were about 15-20 of us in class twice a week. Whatever I learnt I would make into a lesson to teach myself and then to teach other people,' Michael said.

But it was Roy Wanyarra Banning who showed me the way through the knot of grammatical complexities, and we were assisted by the work of linguists who had visited in the 1970s and documented a lot of the language, he said.

Djabugay teachers such as Rhonda Brim scoff at the idea that their language was ever dead. Rhonda says it is now 'very well alive and it's going to stay alive. Teaching means everything to me,' she says. 'I'm proud of what we're doing, I'm proud I'm a Bama person, and I'm proud we're teaching our ancestral language.'

TOURIST BOOM

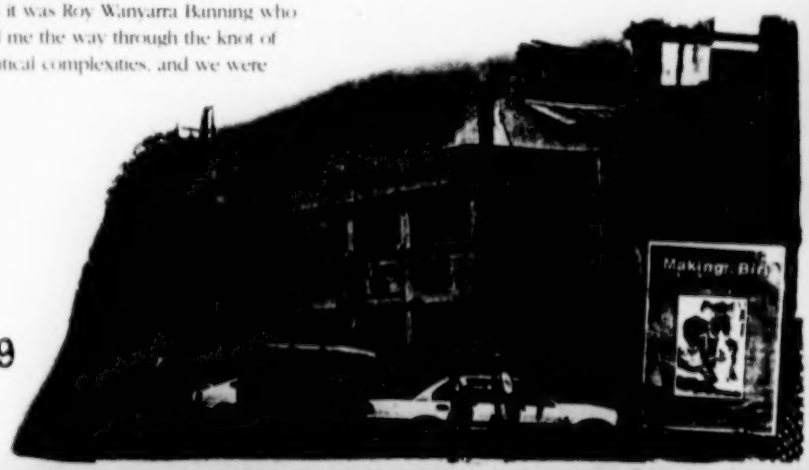
Each year more than a million local and international tourists are drawn to the small town of Kuranda. The Djabugay people make up about a quarter of the town's population.

The culture of the indigenous people, strengthened by language revival, is a drawcard for tourists coming to the Kuranda area. The internationally acclaimed Aboriginal dance group *Tjapukai* perform every day.

Rhonda Gululu Duffin is secretary of the Djabugay Tribal Aboriginal Corporation and works at the Jilli Binna Cultural Resources Centre, which focuses on the revitalisation of Djabugay cultural heritage. The centre features cultural displays, guided tours, photograph collections, family histories, bushwalks and an oral history project.

'We also organise rainforest walks. One of our elders, Warren Brim, taught and assisted myself and others at Jilli Binna with the language of the rainforest,' Rhonda said.

He only had five years education, but he taught and guided university students through the rainforest, passing on all the knowledge he could before he passed away.



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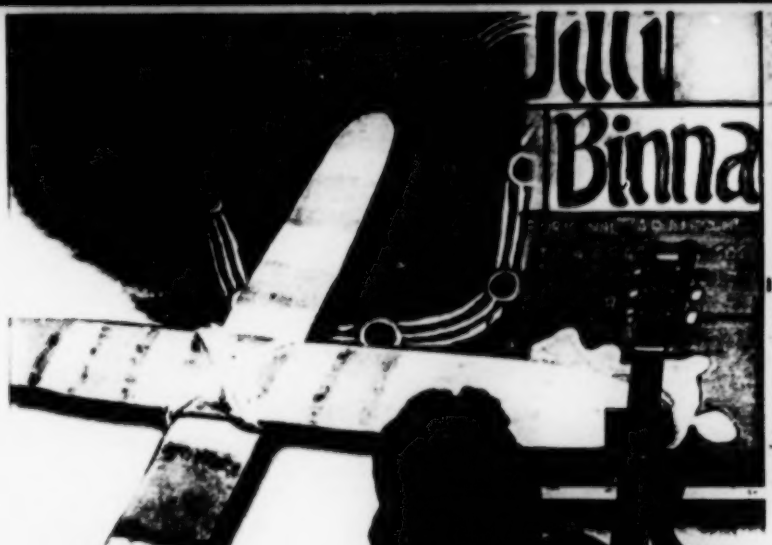

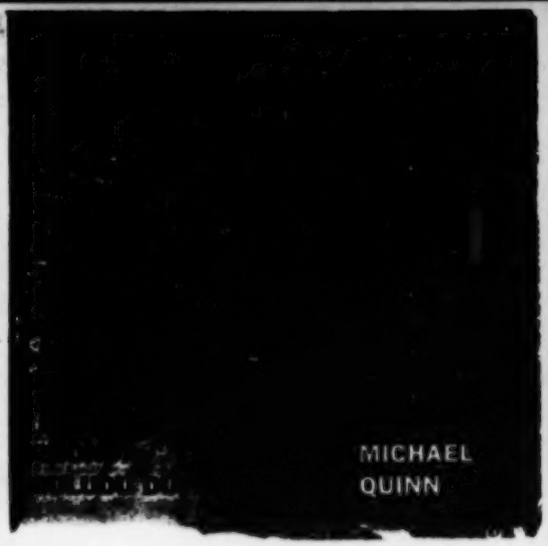

Ngawu ngirrma waygany
Now that I found my
Ngawu buwai bugang
language I'm teaching
djabugay bibunbay-
Djabugay to the kids
ngunda Ngawu dagil
I am getting stronger
maying
I know where
Ngawu djabi dja:
I'm going
ngawu gaiing

DJABUGAY
Ashley Galgam Coleman

The power of song

Ashley Galgam Coleman is a member of Djabugay band, **Gudju Gudju** *(Rainbow)*. According to Ashley, their music is mainly contemporary Djabugay songs written for the kids so they could pick up the language.

'Our second tape and CD will be released in July by Larrikin. I play bass, guitar and clapsticks; Roy Wanyarra Banning helps us write our songs; Michelle Mimu Collins sings; Meriel Averis plays fiddle, mandolin and guitar and Michael Quinn plays the whistle.

After three years of community classes, Ashley is now a teacher at the school. He says that getting back his ancestral language 'was like getting back on your feet again.'

Ashley uses his guitar in all his classes at Kuranda State School. 'I find the language is picked up more easily through songs and rhythm,' he says.

'Now that I found my language and I'm teaching it to the kids, I feel stronger, and I know where I'm going. The Bama kids are also stronger from learning it. They are doing much better at school.'

Torres Strait

THE OLD PEOPLE ARE 'LIVING TEXTBOOKS'

THE MOVEMENT OF SO MANY Torres Strait Islanders to mainland Australia has seriously disrupted indigenous Torres Strait Islander languages and culture.

When they move to Australia, most young people learn Broken, which means fewer and fewer learn their ancestral language.

To help stem the loss of Torres Strait languages, a national mainland language centre is being established in Townsville.

The centre will send language materials to community language centres wherever there are Torres Strait Islanders.

Torres Strait Islander representative on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation of Languages (FATSIL) Executive, Dana Ober, said: 'The plan is to concentrate on the development of teaching materials and training of teachers – before they go into teaching.

'We have a sense of urgency here on the mainland where most Torres Strait Islanders are now living. Just about everyone can speak Broken, but young people are showing less and less interest in the Islander languages.

'This teaching package will cater for community classes taught by trained Torres Strait Islander language speakers.'

PORTRAIT OF A LANGUAGE WORKER

Mary Bani knows first hand what it is like to lose her language. 'My ancestral language is Kala Lagaw Ya from the Western Island region of Torres Strait, but I cannot speak it,' she says. 'I was unable to learn it when I was younger, but I now have

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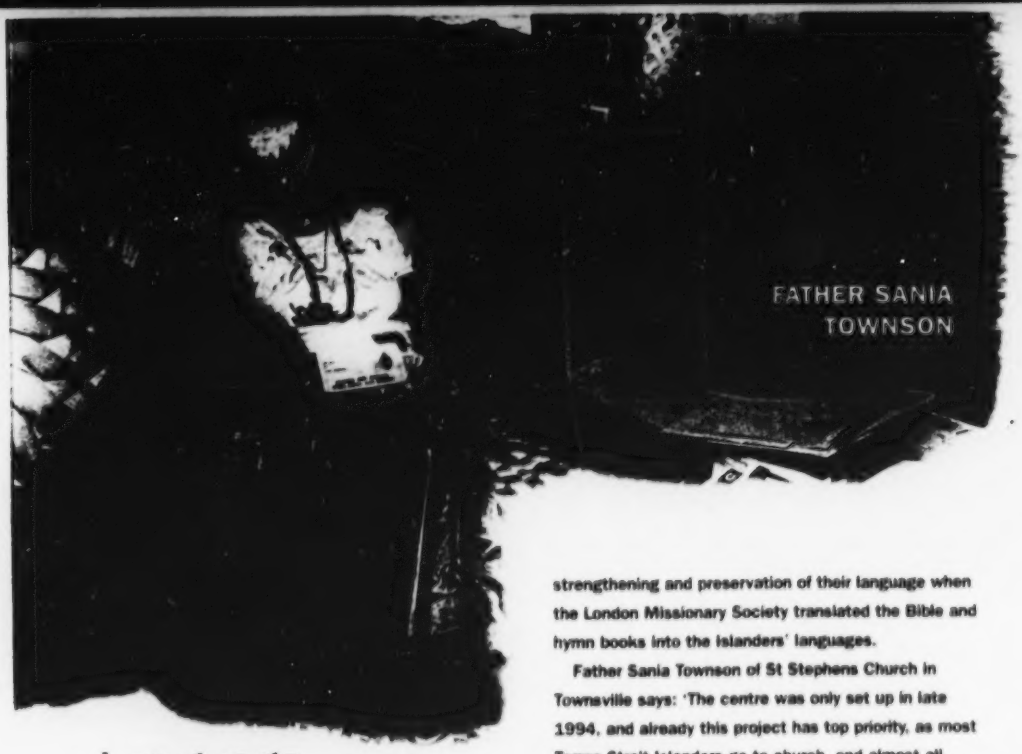


FATHER SANIA TOWNSON

Language maintenance through song

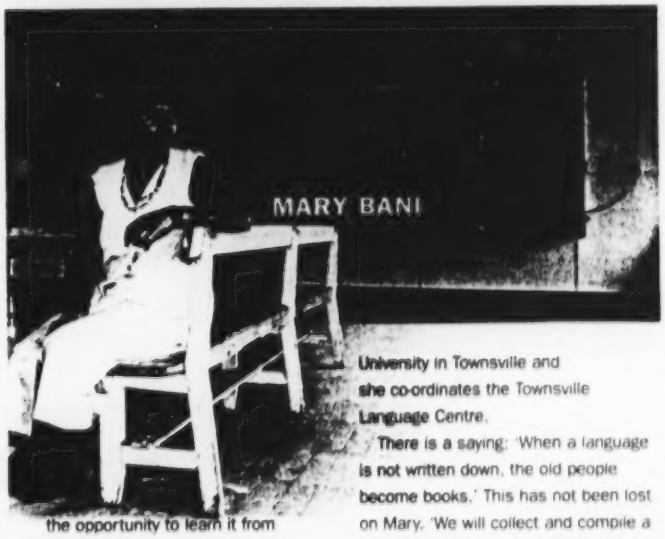
The first language project of the Torres Strait Islander Language Centre in Townsville is the translation of a complete hymn book into the two indigenous languages.

Unlike most other parts of Australia, the Torres Strait Islander experience of church missionaries led to the strengthening and preservation of their language when the London Missionary Society translated the Bible and hymn books into the Islanders' languages.

Father Sania Townson of St Stephens Church in Townsville says: 'The centre was only set up in late 1994, and already this project has top priority, as most Torres Strait Islanders go to church, and almost all know the hymns by heart.'

Father Townson's ambitions do not end there. 'I also want to start a newsletter in our languages, we must have this language program going soon. When the older people die out, our language will die out too,' he said.

For Townsville language centre worker Jacob Pilot, the hymn book helped him out when the electoral commission called at his house. 'They did not believe there were Torres Strait Islander languages until I showed them the hymn book.'



MARY BANI

the opportunity to learn it from relatives and through indigenous learning channels as I work.'

Mary is a graduate of James Cook University in Townsville and she co-ordinates the Townsville Language Centre.

'There is a saying: 'When a language is not written down, the old people become books.' This has not been lost on Mary. 'We will collect and compile a full range of stories from the Meriam Mir language of the Eastern Islands, where the language has links to the Papua New Guinea mainland; the Western Islander language which has links with the mainland languages; as well as the stories which now belong to the creole language of Broken,' she said.

'They will not just be myths and legends but oral history as well. We want to hear from the older people what it was like to migrate to the mainland, what happened during the World Wars, and big events like that.'

Mary is also excited at the prospect of a degree course in Torres Strait Islander Studies being offered at James Cook University in 1996.

'This means there will be three-way support for the maintenance and revival of our language culture,' she says. 'There is already the "living university" of the Islands, then this national language centre, and now a full-degree course.'

*** The Torres Strait Islands are between the tip of Cape York and Papua New Guinea.**

*** Almost all Torres Strait Islander Australians are bilingual, and many speak three languages.**

*** The sea-based economy of the Islands today supports 6,000 Torres Strait Islanders, another 20,000 are scattered throughout Australia.**

*** The indigenous languages of Torres Strait are Meriam Mir from the Eastern group of Islands and Kala Lagaw Ya from the Western Islands.**

*** The two major languages spoken in the Torres Strait Islands are English and Torres Strait Island Broken – a creole.**

*** Torres Strait Islander (TSI) Broken comes from the expression 'broken English'. It is a primary language with its own distinctive grammar and other language structures and can be understood in other Pacific Island nations.**

*** Broken became a language when the generations born after 1900 used it as their primary language. For most communities, Broken has been the mother tongue for two to four generations.**

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EDUCATION

Yipirinya

YOUNG PEOPLE ARE THE KEY TO THE FUTURE

NOBODY ELSE IN THIS WORLD can go back as far as Aboriginal people can,' said Kevin Buzacott, former cultural director of Yipirinya School, at the Keeping Languages Strong conference, in 1989.

'Through the old people's stories, through the country and through the language. So the languages must be kept strong. That's why Yipirinya School first started in Alice Springs in 1978.'

Yipirinya school was established by residents of the Alice Springs town camps. The community wanted their children to learn traditional languages in an environment which understood and respected their culture.

Yipirinya has set the pace for 'two-way' or bi-lingual indigenous education in Australia. Each day, half of the classes are given in one of four Aboriginal languages and the rest of the day's classes are taught in English.

Yipirinya school plays a pivotal role in language and culture maintenance. It is the only mainstream school in Alice Springs with a bilingual program. For many in the town, that is why Yipirinya is called the 'true school' of Alice Springs.

Students at
Kurdu-kurdu High
secondary schools
school-ria,
study only overseas
pina-mani kalu-jana
languages like Spanish,
overseas language,
Greek, or other languages.
Spanish, Greek,
We should be studying our
ngula-pinki. Yapa-kurlangu
own Aboriginal
language yungulpalu
languages in the
study-mantaria.
high schools.

WARLPIRI
Christopher
Japangardi
Poulson
from KEEPING LANGUAGES STRONG Conference Booklet, Darwin, 1989.

ARTS

Brook Andrew

Revival of indigenous languages can take just about any form, particularly when creativity is involved. Brook Andrew, a 25-year-old inter-disciplinary visual artist from Sydney, uses his art as a medium for exposing people to his own language.

'Art is an excellent medium for exposing people to our languages because you can do so much with it and reach so many people,' says Brook.

Brook, a Wiradjuri person, says he likes to use language in his art because it helps to make the messages contained in his artworks clearer.

He aims to make statements through his art about the way white people have eroded indigenous culture, but in a subtle and ironic way. Using language enables him to do this.

'I use language and text in my work because it's challenging – you can cross boundaries with language. It's confronting.'

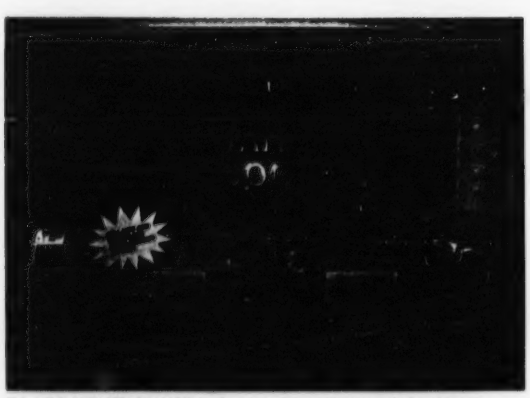
Brook came to learn some of his family's traditional language, Wiradjuri - which originates from central western NSW - through his relatives, the community around him and by researching the different dialects of the language group.

'Language is an integral part of my art because it's an integral part of my life,' he says.

Brook says his first audience is a black audience.

'I want my art to motivate black people into doing things to revive and preserve our culture. Get out there and show non-indigenous people what we've got.'

Other indigenous artists who use language as a form of artistic expression include Fiona Foley, Ian Abdulla, Rea and Gordon Bennett.



I'LL GIVE YOU PROPAGANDA (above), a computer generated text piece involving sound recordings and telephones, was featured in the Art Gallery of NSW's 1993 Australia Perspecta exhibition. Brook Andrews work was also featured on two billboards at Sydney's Redfern and Summer Hill train stations. The word **GWANGNE**, means crazy.

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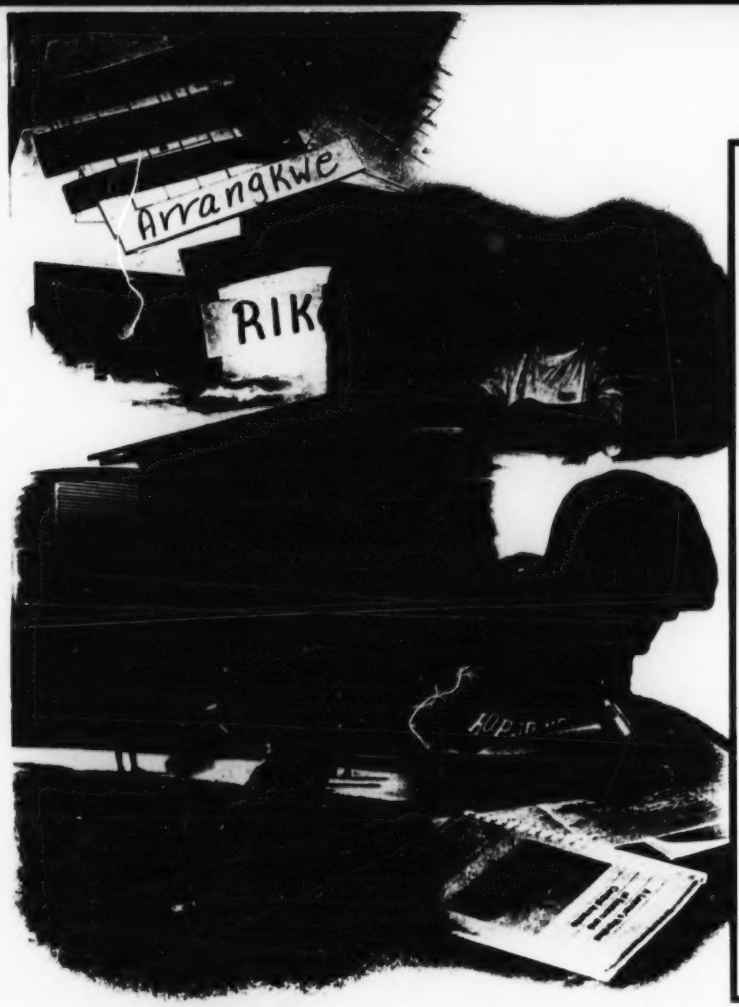


Learning indigenous languages in schools

It is not only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who benefit from learning indigenous languages. Children in the wider community can also gain from learning about the indigenous history of Australia.

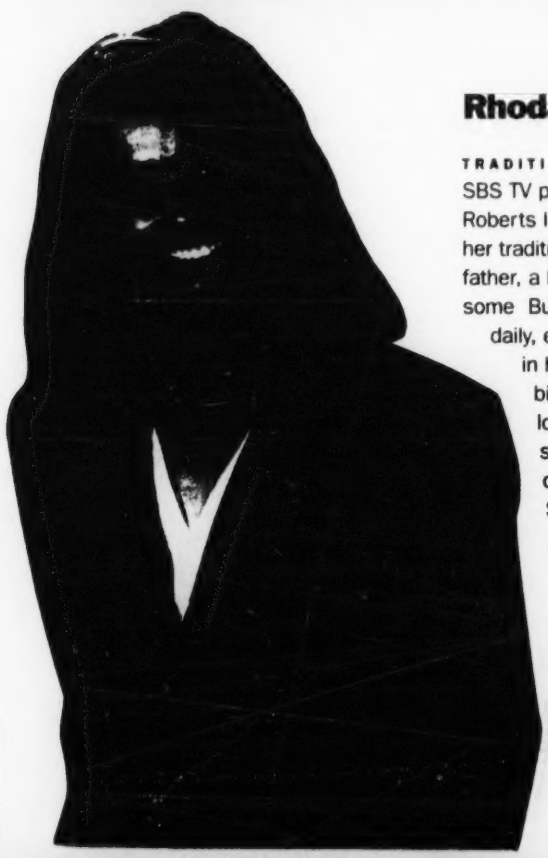
Bama language teacher Rhonda Brim (see page 8), from far north Queensland says: 'It's about time Australian children learnt the true history and culture of this country.'

A NATIONAL CURRICULUM

Indigenous languages will be taught to students in their last two years of school if the Australian Indigenous Language Framework (AILF) is adopted.

The AILF is developing a national framework for teaching Australian indigenous languages to senior students, as well as highlighting the nature of indigenous languages and their importance to all Australians. Established in 1995, the AILF is currently trialing language programs at various pilot schools in the NT, SA, Vic, Qld, WA.

A similar framework, set up by the NSW Board of Studies, is also being piloted at schools around NSW. It aims to develop an Indigenous Languages Framework for schools and communities, from pre-school to Year 12, by the end of 1996.



Rhoda Roberts

TRADITIONAL LANGUAGE: SBS TV presenter and actor Rhoda Roberts learnt the little she knows of her traditional language from her father, a Bundjalung elder. She uses some Bundjalung words and phrases daily, especially around the children in her family. 'But I only know a bit of my language — I would love to know more,' Rhoda says of Bundjalung, which originates from far north New South Wales.

TEACHING: When she was a child, Rhoda learnt Bundjalung secretly, because the speaking of indigenous languages was forbidden by the government until 1969. Today she passes on her knowledge to children in NSW primary schools. One of her techniques is to identify regularly used words and translate them into Bundjalung — for example, g'day is **gingahgali**, kids is **jarthem**, and a cheeky, mischievous child is **moogal**.

ON IDENTITY: 'Children in urban areas of NSW often don't speak their traditional language fluently, but will use many of the words and phrases. Languages keep them together, they give young Aboriginal kids yet another reason to be proud of their heritage.'

A WAY OF LIFE: Part of Rhoda's wedding ceremony was performed in Bundjalung. She says: 'It was a beautiful ceremony – my Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal family and friends loved the way it was performed across two cultures.'

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ACTION

CONSULTATION & PARTICIPATION

The introduction of a language program cannot be imposed on a community by an outsider.

Rather, it should result from a groundswell of interest and concern by community members about their language(s) and culture.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation of Languages (FATSIL) can advise you about local language centres and committees. (Source: *'Let's Talk Our Language': Language Survival Strategies for Aboriginal Languages*, Beth Graham and Kathryn Gale.)

RESOURCES

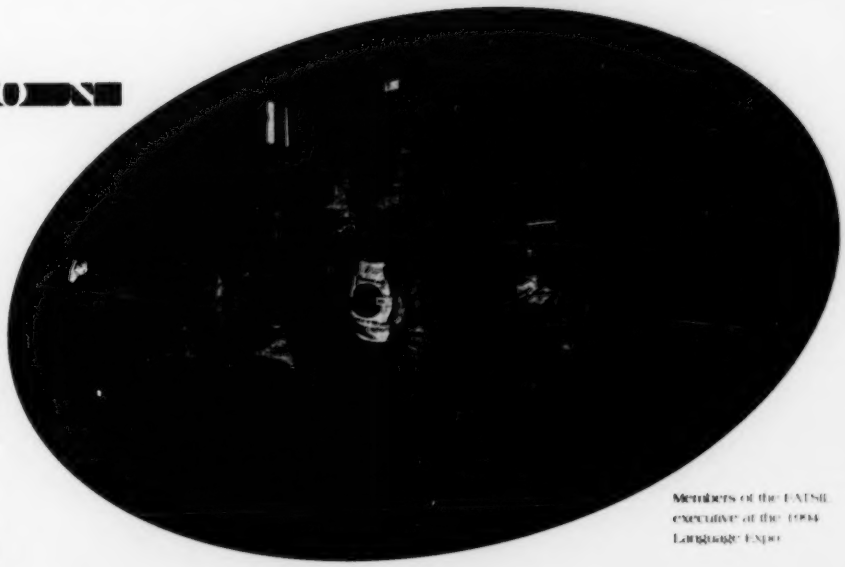
It is also important to establish the availability and extent of resources for the language program. Clearly, the richest and most reliable sources of language are the speakers themselves.

Secondary resources, including historical sources, word lists and books are also important. The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) has a wide range of oral, visual, video and written resources available. (Source: Greg McKellar, Burran Aboriginal Corporation Aboriginal Language Program, Bourke, NSW.)

FUNDING/SUPPORT

Program funding also needs to be considered. Several programs for teaching indigenous languages at schools are currently being funded by state education departments around Australia. Contact the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Unit in the Board of Studies/Department of Education in your state.

ATSIC, land councils or your local school could also assist with information and support.



Members of the FATSIL executive at the 1994 Language Expo

'We must regain control of our languages.'

THE ABORIGINAL and Torres Strait Islander Corporation of Languages (FATSIL) is the national indigenous voice on the maintenance, renewal and reclamation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.

FATSIL chairperson Liz Smith believes the future will be much more positive when indigenous peoples are accepted as the ultimate authority on their languages.

'We must regain control over the use of our languages in culturally appropriate ways,' she says.

'Our languages should also be spoken nationally in a manner similar to languages which are not indigenous to Australia.'

According to Liz, the lack of moral and financial commitment from the Federal Government is a major barrier to the successful revival of languages.

'Another problem is that the agenda of Aboriginal people, where it relates to languages, is in many instances overlooked, if not disregarded, by the agendas of other groups and government agencies,' Liz said.

FATSIL executive secretary Ysola Best says people learn languages by using them in everyday life.

'People are realising that even recording just a few words — place names or regions on a map — is one very important way of maintaining languages.

'If words are written down by linguists, the language has technically been saved, but for it to be revived, the communities have to actually pass the language down to their children and inspire them to use it.'

According to Ysola, mapping often provides a very good starting point for people — it says to them 'this is our country and this is where our language is used'.

'Self mapping allows people to see at what geographical point the language shifted and changed — people can actually hear the shift between regions.

Ysola says, 'Understanding the regional language differences is the key to community knowledge. This is why it is important for communities to have the opportunity to determine the direction of language revival programs.'

THE FUNDING STRUCTURE

• MONEY FROM ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER COMMISSION (ATSIC) helps maintain and develop indigenous languages. ATSIC distributed $3.1 million in 1994-95 through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages Initiatives Program (ATSILIP) to regional language centres and regional language management committees.

• REGIONAL LANGUAGE CENTRES like those at Port Hedland and Kuranda, which are featured in this booklet, provide support for local community language projects.

• REGIONAL LANGUAGE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES provide an alternative system to language centres, and are made up of regional representatives of language groups and indigenous organisations. These committees are the decision-making bodies for the distribution of ATSILIP funds in their region, but do not employ full-time staff or act as resource centres.

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About This Booklet

This booklet provides a snapshot of language revival and maintenance programs around Australia. It is not an exhaustive study of the area. The project was funded by the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training and produced by Social Change Media.

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Resources

Australian Aboriginal Languages: A General Introduction 2nd edn. Barry J. Blake. UQP, Queensland,1991.

The Languages of Australia R.M.W. Dixon. CUP

Language and Culture in Aboriginal Australia Michael Walsh and Colin Yallop (Eds) Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1993.

Macquarie Aboriginal Words: A Dictionary of Words from Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages Nick Thieberger and William McGregor (Eds) Macquarie Library, Sydney, 1994.

Aboriginal Languages in Education Debbie Hartman and John Henderson (Eds) IAD Press, Alice Springs.

Paper and Talk: A Manual for Reconstructing Materials in Australian Indigenous Languages from Historical Sources Nicholas Thieberger (ed) Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1995.

Long Time, Olden Time: Aboriginal accounts of Northern Territory History (Interactive CDRom package which uses images, words, maps and photography) Peter and Jay Read (Eds) Firmware, Sydney, 1993.

'Let's Talk Our Language': Language Survival Strategies for Aboriginal Languages (A comprehensive resources package and guide for establishing language programs in schools and communities. As yet, unpublished) Beth Graham and Kathryn Gale. For more information, contact the authors: KG (03) 486 1952, BG (03) 817 3423.

Contacts

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Language Centres and related organisations

NATIONAL

FATSIL - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation of Languages
Cnr Plantation Rd and Martens St
Beenleigh QLD 4207
Phone: (07) 807 8933
Fax: (07) 807 8922

AIATSIS - Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
GPO Box 553 Canberra ACT 2601
Phone: (06) 246 1111
Fax: (06) 249 7310

AILF - Australian Indigenous Languages Framework
60 Greenhill Rd, Wayville SA 5034
Phone: (08) 372 7516
Fax: (08) 372 7590

QUEENSLAND

Wondunna Aboriginal Corporation for Culture
c/- Hervey Bay PO Hervey Bay QLD 4655

Djabugay Tribal Aboriginal Co-op
PO Box 34, Kuranda, QLD 4872
Phone: (070) 938859
Fax: (070) 937629

Guugu Yimidhirr Language Centre
c/- PO Hopevale, QLD 4871
Phone: (070) 609261; 609232
Fax: (070) 609262

Kombumerri Aboriginal Corporation for Culture
PO Box 668 Runaway Bay QLD 4216
Phone: (07) 807 6155
Fax: (07) 807 6144

Yugambeh Museum - Language and Heritage Centre
Cnr Plantation Rd and Martens St
Beenleigh QLD 4207
Phone: (07) 807 6155
Fax: (07) 807 6144

VICTORIA

Victorian State Language Committee
Victorian State Library - Koori Oral History Unit, Melbourne
Phone: (03) 669 9057
Fax: (03) 663 1480

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Fitzroy Crossing Annexe of KLRC
PO Box 86 Fitzroy Crossing, WA 6765
Phone: (091) 915124
EMail: istackpole@peg.pegasus.oz.au

Kimberley Language Resource Centre,
PMB 11 Halls Creek, WA 6770
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Fax: (091) 686 023
EMail: klrchc@peg.pegasus.oz.au

Minma Dawang Woorlab-gerring
PO Box 162, Kununurra, WA 6743
Phone: (091) 691 029
Fax: (091) 682 639
EMail: mdwg@peg.pegasus.oz.au

Noongar Language and Culture Centre
16 Little St, Carey Park, Bunbury, WA 6230 Phone: (097) 912 165

Pundulmurra Aboriginal College
Parker St, South Hedland, WA 6722
Phone: (091) 401 166
Fax: (091) 401 227

Wangka Maya Pilbara Aboriginal Language Centre
PO Box 2736, South Hedland, WA 6722
Phone: (091) 722 344
Fax: (091) 722 355
Email: alephang@peg.pegasus.oz.au

Wangkanyi Ngurra Tjurta Aboriginal Corporation
PMB 36, Kalgoorlie, WA 6430
Phone: (090) 211 655
Fax: (090) 218 128

Yamaji Language Centre,
PO Box 433, Geraldton, WA 6530
Phone: (099) 643550, 214477
Fax: (099) 642634
EMail: yamaji@peg.pegasus.oz.au

NEW SOUTH WALES

NSW Board of Studies
PO Box 460 North Sydney 2060
Phone: (02) 925 8111
Fax: (02) 923 2669

Muurbay Aboriginal Language and Culture Co-op Ltd
648 Sherwood Rd, Sherwood via Kempsey, NSW 2440
Phone: (065) 669 353
Fax: (065) 669 143

Wundardun,
28 Dean St, Casino NSW 2470
Phone (066) 625 636

TASMANIA

Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre
Palawa Karni Program
198 Elizabeth St, GPO Box 569F, Hobart, Tas 7001
Phone: (002) 348311
Fax: (002) 311348

Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre
Palawa Karni Program
North & North-West Region
163 John St, PO Box 531
Launceston Tas 7250
Phone: (003) 316 966
Fax: (003) 314 258

NORTHERN TERRITORY

Centre for Australian Languages and Linguistics, Batchelor College,
c/- PO Batchelor, NT 0845
Phone: (089) 760 002
Fax (089) 397 127

Darwin Regional Aboriginal Language Association
Phone: (089) 814 142
Fax: (089) 817 031

East Arnhem Language Centre
c/- Yirrkala School, PO Box 936, Nhulunbuy, NT 0881
Phone: (089) 872 475
Fax: (089) 871 725

Institute for Aboriginal Development
PO Box 2531, Alice Springs, NT 0871
Phone: (089) 511 311
Fax: (089) 531 884

Kardu Numida Language Incorporated
O.L.S.H. c/- The Brothers,
Port Keats, NT 0822
Phone: (089) 782 477; 782363
Fax: (089) 782300

Katherine Regional Aboriginal Language Centre
PO Box 89 Katherine, NT 0851
Phone: (089) 711 233
Fax: (089) 710 561

Nauiyu Nambiya Language Centre
PMB 28 Daly River, NT 0822
Phone: (089) 782 427
Fax: (089) 782 590

Papulu Appari-Kari Language Centre
c/- PO Box 1108 Tennant Creek, NT 0861
Phone: (089) 623 270
Fax: (089) 623 280

West Arnhem Minjilang,
Crocker Island via Darwin, NT 0822
Phone: (089) 790 299; 790295
Fax: (089) 790 297

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Yaitya Warra Wodli, South Australian Aboriginal Language Centre,
1 Lipson St, Port Adelaide, SA 5015
Phone: (08) 2410227
Fax: (08) 2410228

TORRES STRAIT ISLANDS

James Cook University Language Centre
Townsville QLD 4811
Phone: (077) 815 517

Thanks

We would like to thank all the organisations and individuals for their considerable assistance in the preparation of this booklet, including members of the project reference group and FATSIL. Special thanks are due to the staff of the language centres featured in this booklet who generously gave their time to tell us about their work in maintaining and reviving indigenous languages.

Please Note: Readers should be aware that in some Aboriginal communities, seeing the names and photos of deceased people may cause distress. Before using this work in such communities, it is important to consult senior community members, and act on their advice.

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Christine Anu is a 25-year-old singer-songwriter. Born in Cairns, she returned to the island of Mabuiag in the Torres Strait at age 10. After studying for five years at the National Aboriginal and Islander Dance School and touring with the Bangarra Dance Theatre, she released her first single 'The Monkey and The Turtle'. 1995 sees the release of her debut CD Stylus Up, which has been described as a 'a sound that evokes Caribbean cool in some (songs), and Soweto street music in others'.

'I believe language is the core of culture.'

My traditional language is Kala Lagaw Ya/Kala Kawaw Ya. Even though my first language is Torres Strait Creole, my parents always communicated to my brother and sisters and me in their "first tongue" and spoke to each other in language around us.

ON IDENTITY: I believe language is the core of culture. I believe expression stems from language in the forms of self expression, art, dance, music and theatre story telling, poems and writing to name just a few. Because not all of our our traditional language survived, what forms of expression we have come to know from existing language is important to how we identify with ourselves and each other.

ON HER MUSIC: I've learnt how melodic my language is and it has lent a uniqueness to the sound and also to my personal expression. My pride and confidence come from knowing my ancestral heritage. My traditional language and culture have been handed down through many generations. I have a responsibility to see it is passed on and what I am doing is helping its preservation through performance and writing.

FAVOURITE WORDS: *Mura Kalmel Balaya:* all brothers and sisters, together now. *Em:* a word used to describe the undivided power of the eye of the storm. A respect word also used instead of a person's name who has passed on. *Which way?:* a greeting word, "Hello, how are you?" Or a question, "What's the situation?" *Tuks:* brother/s and sister/s. Full word is *tukuyap*. These words represent important values: family and respect.

THE FUTURE: The "best possible future" is ideally education. I would like to see more language (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) in school curriculums, books, newspapers, newsletters and magazines, computer programs, television and video programs, music, theatre and film. Also for indigenous and non-indigenous people wishing to learn about or more about their language, I suggest things like language camps and workshops.

ON LEARNING: There needs to be awareness in the wider community of the need to maintain/service traditional language. The main hurdle is ignorance. What I know and what I want to know about my language and culture, I've gone out of my way to learn. It won't come to you, you have to want to know it. I grew up as a young adult in Sydney and there is a great need for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to communicate and express themselves. These young people are not confident or too 'shame' to communicate on their own. But as a group we are very strong.

BODY LANGUAGE: The community of "black fellas" I am around all the time all speak versions of the same language, a mix of Creole and urban-speak. We understand each other's expressions and non-verbal language. "Black fellas" are great mimics because of their eye for body language.

ILLUSTRATIONS by Tony Thorne based on drawings by Patrick Wlaip